

Scenes of Salvation : Rhetorical Strategies and Representations of Self Between Christian and Buddhist Epistemes

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Introduction

Japan has a rich history of inquiry into the role of the body and into embodied modes of knowing, particularly in the practice of meditation and its nexus with the creative, visual, and martial arts. In the West, a consideration of the body and its role in modalities of knowing is often referred to as “feminist.” The notable lack of study in the West regarding masculine embodiment is a promising endeavor (see Lakoff and Johnson). An appreciation of the ontological status of the female body in a Judeo-Christian context and in its intimate relation with the operations of the mind in language, rhetoric, and meaning-making constitutes a field of inquiry which I intend to explore in the context of this article.

The Christian Episteme : Figuring Mimesis in the Rhetoric of Interpretation

Strategies of representation are intimately determined by the bodies of knowledge they evoke. What we are permitted to know is intimately connected with the epistemic context of one’s inquiry. Eric Auerbach, in *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (1953), has located a characteristically Western, Judeo-Christian strategy for representation in his elucidation of “figural interpretation” (73). Characteristic of medieval European literature, figural interpretation is an interpretive dynamic constructed by two “poles”- the figure and its fulfillment (195-6). The figure consists in the master plot as found in the text of the Bible; the Fall of Adam, the Birth of Christ and the Last Judgment. The fulfillment consists in the unfolding of this divine plan in historical time. The figure and its fulfillment are creatively joined to produce figural

realism through what Auerbach calls “vertical links,” whereby “every earthly event and every earthly phenomenon is at all times -- independently of all forward motion -- directly connected with God’s plan” (194). Figural thinking, as a Judeo-Christian method of interpretation, and as “consistently applied to the Old Testament by Paul and the Church Fathers, conceives of Adam as a figure of Christ, of Eve as a figure for the Church, just as generally speaking every event and every phenomenon referred to in the Old Testament is conceived as a figure which only the phenomena or events of Christ’s Incarnation can completely realize or ‘fulfill’” (195).

As Auerbach sees it, figural realism implies an inherent “rigidification of categories,” as this strategy for representing reality consists in a valorization of the vertical over the horizontal (116). With an emphasis on the figural fulfillment of God’s plan (the vertical) events of this world and their fleshy manifestations are no longer perceived as ‘reality,’ but as signification; and earthly connections pale in relation to the divine plan “of which all occurrences are parts and reflection” (555). This Judeo-Christian world-view would consist simply in an interesting exercise in hermeneutics, but for the Bible’s claim to truth, which, as Auerbach puts it, is “tyrannical” (14). Scripture stories “seek to subject us, and if we refuse to be subjected we are rebels” (15). Citizens of a figural reality are trained to be suspicious of materiality, of the body, and of modes of knowledge grounded in a lived experience of the sensory, for it is the world beyond; the abstract, the unseen world which consists in God’s design undergoing its own active fulfillment as prefigured in the Bible. Puritans in particular, by subjecting their own lives to the stories of the Bible, sought an interpretive transformation and a general

method for comprehending reality based on figural interpretation.

What figural realism consists in is a disavowal of the sensory, earthly, horizontal axis of (lived) experience, and a valorization of the abstract (vertical). The vertical links which join these two worlds provide apertures for comprehension, but the frames of these apertures are narrow indeed. For the Puritan episteme, sensory manifestations were bent on entrapping, ensnaring and deceiving one traveling along the path toward fulfillment (salvation). The apprehension of these vertical links, and the experience of 'vision' through which one is swept into this updraft of interpretive energy, constitutes a spiritual comprehension which is the very basis of the Judeo-Christian world-view.

The tradition of figural interpretation reaches back to Plato's *Republic*, not only with Plato's notions of what constitutes the feminization of materia, but also in Plato's Theory of Forms, wherein the material, earthly world is constructed as a representation, in the sense of a secondary (less 'true') manifestation of the ideal, unchanging forms which reside in an abstract reality available only to the faculty of reason. For Auerbach, mimesis, as a strategy for the representation of 'reality,' has much in common with the dynamic of figural interpretation, for both mimesis and figural interpretation are strategies for representing a world which is constructed as the shadow for that which is better, greater, and lies beyond lived experience.

The Buddhist Episteme : Hongaku and the Provisionality of Rhetoric

In contrast to mimesis, and to the figural reality of a Judeo-Christian world-view, there is a fundamental Buddhist epistemic mode found in the dynamic of *hongaku*, or original enlightenment (Jp.本覚). To read a Buddhist text such as the *Lotus Sutra* is to read an experience of enlightenment and to apprehend an enlightened state. Interpretation as a means toward fulfillment in the Judeo-Christian tradition of the Western world-view is, in the case of the *Lotus Sutra*,

replaced by the apprehension of a text which is *both* the means to and the ends for enlightenment. The dynamic of figural interpretation is, from the point of view of the *Lotus Sutra*, entirely absent.

LaFleur notes that there is a tendency to read the *Lotus Sutra* "as merely a sequence of elegant pictures without much real substance" (87). This appraisal is certainly understandable from the point of view of a reader who is positioned wholly in a figural reality where he or she is trained to interpret what lies behind the sensory data on the page, and well beyond the vibrant images apprehended by the mind. This is not to say the *Lotus Sutra* is without parable and allegories, but the mechanism for reading these stories consists in calling attention to the ephemeral nature of these rhetorical modes as expedient modes (Jp.方便: *hōben*) presented to the reader/listener from the position of a narrator who is already in an enlightened reality which cannot be fixed in words. LaFleur uses the term "self-reflexive allegory" to point to the capacity of the *Lotus Sutra* to open one to a reading process which constitutes an apprehension of inner experience and, in this capacity, the reading provides for a radical subjectivity through an apprehension of one's consciousness of openness to the play of form, be it rhetorical, experiential, parabolic, or otherwise.

Ralph Flores articulates a similar notion in his discussion of Buddhist rhetoric when he notes that "traditional 'rhetoric' becomes something other than itself; it becomes *self-subverting*, indicating its status to be fictional, allegorical, ungrounded -- in short, theatrical" (emphasis added) (84). In this conception of discursive structures, the vehicle is no longer the servant of the tenor, and "the illustration is in no way subordinate to what it illustrates" (LaFleur 87). Means and ends collapse; there is nothing to interpret, nothing to see through or to see beyond, and there is no darkness, no opacity of material forms through which our Western gaze must penetrate. Readers who position themselves amidst the logic of enlightenment recognize reality and divine knowledge to be fundamentally interpenetrating, consisting in a mutually referential relationship that is non-

hierarchical. The play of form unfolds, reality happens, but this is a reality which is very different from that which is constructed through figural representation.

Enlightenment, as a state of fulfillment already embodied in all human forms (*hongaku*), is then indistinguishable from the material modalities through which human beings (indeed all sentient beings) locate themselves. From the point of view of figural realism, this perspective of ontological egalitarianism is often perceived as an abolition of dualism (tenor/vehicle, subject/object, mind/body) and can be rendered as a “flattening out” of the visual perspective. Auerbach’s musings in his inaugural chapter, “Odysseus’ Scar,” are interesting in this respect. It is no accident that Auerbach has chosen a scene incorporating strategies for representing the body to distinguish a style of representation in which “the complexity of the psychological life is shown only in the succession and alternation of emotions; whereas the Jewish writers are able to express the simultaneous existence of layers of consciousness and the conflict between them” (13). While a useful trope in figural reality to indicate the dynamic of grappling with the heroics of interpretive thought, the notion of conflict and of a confrontation with oppositional forces is, from the context of a Buddhist hermeneutics, considered illusory and the product of unenlightened thinking.

Classical Western mimesis, and the notion that representations of (figural) reality are subject to higher or better planes of interpretation, is intimately involved with the visual analogy of perspectival space where there is the one, privileged, all seeing eye, who oversees the contents of the picture plane as through the visual trope of a window. In this image of figural realism, visual information travels along one trajectory, toward the eye of the beholder. Auerbach refers to this trans-historical positionality as a “subjectivist-perspectivist procedure,” finding it entirely absent in the works of Homer (7). From an enlightened perspective this subjectivist-perspectivist procedure exists, but is nonetheless illusory. The viewer (subject) is no more valorized than the subject position

of that which is being perceived (object). This collapse of dualism in the logic of the Buddhist episteme results in what LaFleur refers to as a “renewed simplicity rather than a naïve simplicity” and in the redirection of attention to phenomena for their own sake (23).

The call to direct our attention to the material phenomena of the body and to the body as a site for material practice is necessitated for two reasons. In the first place, the body is the site upon which ideology is mapped and, as such, figures as a symbolic/semiotic construction in that very process. There is simply no other means to receive, or to encounter the world around us than through the body. “As a being-in-the world, a person can live only under the fundamental restriction of having a body,” a body that is always placed in relationships to beings other than oneself, that is, to other people and to physical objects (Yuasa 50). To put the body ‘at play’ in discursivities is first to re-cognize not only the instability of gender identification but to encounter one’s body as a field of communal, interconnected meanings and to experience both the provisionality of that subjectivity as well as the specificity of that subject’s position in the world. In the second place, the self cannot act without the body, and amidst such contested and dangerous discursive domains as those where we find ourselves positioned today, it behooves us to think through ourselves in what I call (and others have called) lived experience (Jp. 体験 or *taiken*), that is, experience (and I include thinking as experience) lived through a body which serves not only as a material sign but also as a space for material practice. Lived experience is at the nexus of a number of bodies of thought, including Yuasa Yasuo (see *The Body: Toward an Eastern Mind-Body Theory*, especially chapter two), Elin Diamond (*Unmaking Mimesis*, especially chapter six in what Diamond, via Teresa de Lauretis, thinks of as ‘exoteric experience’) and in the work of George Lakoff and Mark Johnson. Lakoff and Johnson have done significant work in repositioning the body in relation to Western conceptual systems through their (re)examination of

the dynamic in Western culture between metaphorical thought, the embodiment of mind, and the cognitive unconscious.

Scholarship on Allegory in the West

As one might imagine, contrasting Judeo-Christian and Buddhist strategies for representing reality and for the role of rhetoric in apprehending that reality have ramifications, not only on the use of parabolic speech, but also on the nature of what can be rendered epistemologically visible. While allegory in the Buddhist episteme was understood to be a provisional, expedient modality, and a staged medium meant to serve as a means to inner realization which was then discarded, allegory in the West developed into a highly charged, transformative, interpretive practice which afforded access to the universal, salvatory powers of a divine plan.

The etymological root for the word ‘allegory’ is based in the (Grk.) *allos*, meaning “other” and (Grk.) *agoreuein* meaning “to speak publicly” (as in the “*agora*” or marketplace). To speak (write) allegorically then is to speak otherwise in a public fashion, in other words, to speak another (hidden) meaning at the same time that one is speaking for all to hear.

Ernst Robert Curtius, in *European Literature and the Medieval Ages* (reprinted 1990), makes a distinction between allegory and allegoresis: allegory is a useful means of distinguishing literary works which can be reliably grouped into the genre, and allegoresis is the use of allegory as a mode of thinking (of which figural interpretation is a Judeo-Christian manifestation). In the former, allegory is allegorical narrative; wherein an interpretation already adheres in the fictional narrative (be it drama/*Everyman*, poetry/*Faerie Queen*, prose fiction/*Pilgrim’s Progress* or epic/*Divine Comedy*), and in the latter, allegoresis is a mode of thought, a mode of thinking characteristic of interpretation as a whole. From Auerbach’s perspective allegoresis is tantamount to figural interpretation, albeit in a Judeo-Christian religious-

cultural context wherein the jettisoning of a sensuous apprehension of an earthly embodiment (in the market place) is required for the apprehension of the heavenly truth of the (hidden) divine.

Frye in *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957) alluded to the confusion between allegory (as a genre) and allegoresis (as a mode of thinking) when he made the observation that all literary criticism is, in some sense, allegorical – in that literary criticism tells us what the text means, i.e., what is hidden. What Frye is alluding to here is actually allegoresis, or the type of thought characteristic of literary criticism, a criticism which is characterized by interpretation. Allegorical narrative is distinctive because the reader is aware (as they read) that there is an interpretation already built into the text that she is called upon to understand. Literary criticism involves an interpretive dynamic, but does not usually belong to the genre of allegory and is considered wholly different from allegorical narrative. The (con)fusion of allegory (genre) and allegoresis (mode of thinking) is characteristic of scholarship on the study of allegory.

Edwin Honig defined allegory as a genre in *Dark Conceit: The Making of Allegory* (1959) when he appropriated Edmund Spenser’s appellation for his “*Faerie Queen*” (1598) as a ‘*darke conceite*.’ Honig dwelt on the revelatory characteristics of Homeric allegory in that the poet/divine spoke allegorically in order to share an experience of the sacred through divine inspiration, amidst the need to maintain profundity through the dynamic of hiding. Over the next 20 years a series of works were published on the nature of allegory. Angus Fletcher (1964) made the claim that allegory was not a genre but a mode of thought; Michael Murrin with his *Veil of Allegory* (1969) concurred. Gaye Clifford, in *The Transformation of Allegory* (1974) agreed with Fletcher in that allegory is a mode of thought (allegoresis) – though she differed with Fletcher in claiming that allegory took specific forms.

Maureen Quilligan cleared up a good deal of confusion between allegory as a genre and allegoresis as a mode of thought while bringing the investigation

of allegory full circle by declaring allegory a genre, just as Honig had done 20 years before. Though Quilligan in her *Language of Allegory* (1970) agreed with Honig, her viewpoint (as one adumbrating post-structuralist thought) contributed significantly to my own inquiry into allegory, in part because she clearly delineates between allegory and allegoresis, and situates her interest at the nexus of allegory and interpretative practices (allegoresis). As allegorical narrative has an interpretation already built into the text, the reader's responsibility is to become self-aware as to his or her interpretive practices, and to become alert as to how he or she (correctly or incorrectly) reads the allegory. Quilligan's study culminates in an inquiry into the dynamic of interpretive practice and in an inquiry into the nature of how language makes meaning; i.e., into language itself.

Allegory Through the (Western) Ages

The roots of allegorical narrative in the West lie with Homer, with Virgil, and in Cicero's *The Dream of Scipio* wherein both a personification of natural forces and the cloaking through fables afford another reading available to those who are capable of hearing it. According to Curtius, allegoresis developed in the early 6th century as a means for the Greeks to absorb Homer's texts (Homeric allegoresis) (204-5). This interpretive strategy was then transferred to the Jewish hermeneutics of the Old Testament and thereby appropriated as the Judeo-Christian allegoresis (figural interpretation) characteristic of the Church fathers. In a Judeo-Christian context, allegoresis traces its beginnings from Prudentius's (384-410? C.E.) *Psychomachia* (in the use of allegorical figures from a Christian world-view) to its fruition in the Middle Ages with the doctrine of multiple meaning in the 14th century as articulated in Dante's *Il Convito* (2nd bk, 1st ch.). Dante (con)fuses allegoresis with allegorical narrative when he instructs readers of his *Divine Comedy* to travel through a hierarchy of meaning by moving from the literal, to the allegorical, to the moral,

and finally to the anagogic.

In the late Renaissance, the Judeo-Christian notion of the (Christian) divine as permeating all of creation served as a powerful proposition which established both the common ground and the scaffolding for allegory in the early 17th century. Before the middle of the 17th century and in the figural realism of a Judeo-Christian world-view, allegory was provided with an assured and informed readership wherein the reading public maintained a common base of assumptions with which to encounter and to read an allegorical text in order to experience its (Christian) significance. Dante's *Divine Comedy*, William Langland's *Piers The Plowman*, and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, for example, though differing widely in genre and content, were allegorical narratives which were collectively understood.

With the English Revolution (1640-60), the "world turned upside down" and the technique of allegoresis (not allegorical narrative) was espoused by the Dissenters of the day (Ranters, Diggers, Levellers and Quakers) to subjectivize their readings of the Bible. With allegoresis, individuals felt empowered to read the Bible as they saw fit. It was now permissible to disobey the tenets of the Bible so long as the individual's interpretation was felt to be the reading appropriate for oneself.

This sounded the bell for the end of an age of allegory. Jonathan Swift in his "A Tale of a Tub" (1704) parodies the very notion of allegoresis [now associated with the enthusiastic zeal of the Roundheads and their vociferous (if not vituperative) interpretive force] in the figures of Peter, Martin, and Jack. For Swift, the issue is not that of interpretation but of the very notion of involving readers in making any sort of meaning at all from a text (here the Bible). Swift adumbrated a change in English readers relation to language and to the rise of the New Science where the 'one word/one thing' notion of rhetoric meant that words became, not revelations with the authority of "Logos," but transparencies through which one gathered empirical 'data' in the interest of experiment and observation.

Rhetoric was now under deep suspicion (and no wonder after the trauma and chaos of the Interregnum), and Judeo-Christian allegory, where there is so much distance between tenor and vehicle, gave way to the fashion of symbolism (where tenor and vehicle are closer and tend to overlap) in the works of the Romantics in the later 18th century.

Allegorical narrative continued in this modern guise with Nathaniel Hawthorne (*Scarlet Letter*), Herman Melville (*The Confidence Man*), Franz Kafka (*The Trial*, and others), Thomas Pynchon (*The Crying of Lot 49*), and James Joyce (*Ulysses*). What remains constant in the West amidst changing cultural notions about the ability of language and rhetoric to tell “truth” lies in the ability of allegorical narrative to deploy an articulation of the sacred, even if that “sacred” leaks from its Judeo-Christian crucible to an articulation of the ability to get through life one day at a time. The figure of Leopold Bloom (*Ulysses*) presents a notion of the sacred in an achievement of happiness through one’s ability to live well within one’s own chosen fiction.

Allegory, Interpretation and Post-structural Thought

What is interesting about the relationship between post-structural thought and allegory is that allegory is now studied as a site for interpretation, not only as a vehicle to dramatize the ways in which human beings form interpretations of texts, but also as a site to interrogate the degree to which we, as humans, can control our own meaning-making. Allegorical narrative contains allegoresis -- the interpretation is already embedded in the text, and it is the reader’s responsibility to interpret the text accordingly. In this way, and paradoxically, allegorical narrative is particularly unsuited to allegoresis because the interpretation is already a part of the narrative. With allegoresis already contained in allegory, allegorical narrative is a genre which calls upon the reader to distinguish the particular ways allegory makes meaning and calls attention to rhetoric itself. Allegory has been reclaimed by post-structuralists for this

reason – in reading allegory the reader is brought to the self-awareness of how he or she makes meaning and to the drama of the act of reading itself.

Post-structuralist contributions to a study of allegory lie in an awareness that the “text” is not simply what is on the page but encompasses a broad process of meaning-making, indeed, text (semiology) and the deployments of “text” (for a post-structuralist) adhere in the world at large. This move in the study of allegory, to an emphasis on how meaning is made, is an interesting turn (as seen in Quilligan) because allegory involves the reader as a reader of signs and, when done well, draws him/her into a self-conscious awareness of how they read meaning. Post-structuralism and allegorical narrative coincide (in allegoresis) in that they both draw our attention to interpretive practice.

What one now sees in pedagogy of allegory is an awareness that allegory, in speaking publicly of the other, is speaking (on the page) of the ways in which language contains ‘other’ and in drawing attention to its own polysemousness. Puns, analogies, proverbs, and emblems are all tools through which language proliferates in ways we never wholly control, and yet, at the same time, it is this ‘lack of control’ through which language provides the reader with access to an experience of the sacred.

Allegory and Feminist Criticism

Honig notes in his *Dark Conceit* that allegory found much of its stimulus in the need to sublimate the feminine (*allos/other*) in the act of making public. Ian Miller in *Allegory, Myth and Symbol* (1981) and in his article, “The Two Allegories,” notes how germane the scene of the Incarnation is to the dynamic of allegory. The notion of the female body as incarnating the body of Christ seems to have led to a fair amount of anxiety in the thinking of early Christian theologians as they wrestled with the dynamics of desire in the relation between word (logos) made flesh or (more notably) flesh made word and the implications this dynamic may have on the

valorization of an embodied female spirituality. The absence of any coherent, sustained representation of female figures in the Judeo-Christian religious tradition and their absence from the “master plot” of figural realism is, perhaps, a product of this palpable anxiety with regard to the representations of female bodies desirous of union with the (Judeo-Christian) divine. Indeed, it would appear that the ontology of figural representation and that of allegory itself are deeply enmeshed in the Judeo-Christian tradition and in the need to construct an *allos* which is itself a product of the desire to closet representations of an embodied (specifically female) desire.

The impetus to “hide” the material body, and in particular, to hide the hearing/reading of the *Song of Songs* as the only unmediated, frankly desirous female body in the Bible was characteristic of early Jewish theologians. This refusal to acknowledge the epistemological visibility of a woman in the raptures of desire for her beloved led the Church fathers to allegorize the *Song of Songs* – determining a ‘correct’ (albeit hidden) meaning for the Christian readership in that what was ‘really’ indicated was the nature of God’s love for Israel (Judeo) or Christ’s love for his church (Christian). The need to shrink from and to hide the force of female desire in the figure of Mary (lover of God, mother of Christ) has given much impetus to allegory and to the need to see beyond (around, behind, but in all events ignore) the epistemological visibility of material bodies. It would appear that (in the Judeo-Christian tradition) that which is hidden (*allos*) is not simply material, sensuous, nor embodied experience, but is gendered feminine.

Nonetheless, the tradition of desire in the Judeo-Christian world-view in the figure of the female who can and does experience lust (for the divine) did resurface in writings of the 17th century – in particular as Stanley Stewart observes in *The Enclosed Garden* in Andrew Marvell’s poem “The Garden” (1681). The allegory of the garden—as representing the body inviolate of the female in ecstatic union with the divine—was (according to Stewart) a prevalent notion

during the 17th century. Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun’s *Romance of the Rose* also dealt with allegory as a means of representing female desire, but the misogynist tendencies of the second part turn this allegory to parodic dimensions.

Given the historically contentious relationship between allegory and the female body, perhaps it is no accident (given the relationship between the female and allegory) that female experience (as embedded in an allegorical narrative) has been rendered so uniformly invisible in Judeo-Christian scholarship. I would like to argue that the epistemological invisibility of the body in the Christian episteme in the West as compared to the epistemological visibility of the body in the Buddhist episteme in Japan, is generated at least in part by a Judeo-Christian “lens” through which female bodies (and, indeed the bodies which we all inhabit) in so far as they are subjected to allegorical or figural strategies of representation are, quite literally, inconceivable.

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救済の現場：キリスト教と仏教思想に表れる人間の本性

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本論文は、キリスト教の思想と仏教思想に表する自身（セルフ）を論じ、それぞれの"自身"に対しての考え方を分析したものである。仏教の歴史の深い日本では、"本覚"とは、物質的な体を持っている自分を認め、黙想を元にして、自分を救助することを意味する。キリスト教は異なり、「マリア」と言う女性の体 から God（キリスト）が生まれたと信じている元老は、女性の体を認めないキリスト元老であった。実際に自分の体に騙されるほど体は信頼出来ないものである。キリスト教では人間の物質的な体を認めない点を分析して、西洋思想にどんな影響があるのを詳しく論じた。

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